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Beyond the Diaspora

The Study of the Discursive and Social Aspects of Transnational Networking and its Role in Shaping Identities in a European Context

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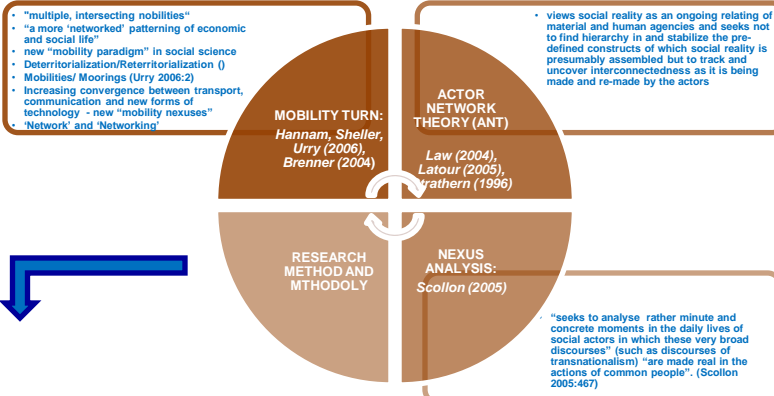
BEYOND THE DIASPORA:

THE STUDY OF THE DISCURSIVE AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKING AND ITS ROLE IN SHAPING TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT

ABSTRACT

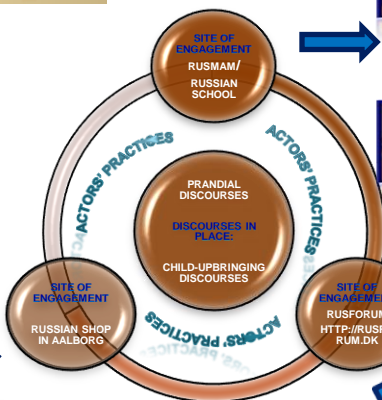
The rapidly increasing mobility of human and non-human agencies, growth of transnational economies, development of the communicational technologies and transportation systems have transformed the process of identity formation making the talk about fluid, mobile, fragmented identities more relevant than ever. These shifts in the mechanisms of identity construction have justifiably triggered large scholarly interest. While scholarly work that emerged as a result of this interest has rightly drawn attention to a large number of problematic issues and challenges connected to transnational living, it has also created a mainstream tendency to discuss the transnational, the migrant, and the mobile as being some sort of temporary, in-between, limbo state of existence. In the post-rational paradigm of thinking, migrancy is being perpetually defined as "a difficult state to be" (Bjuel 2008:368) and the discussions of European identities seem to become firmly positioned within the framework of cognitive psychology vastly borrowing into the repertoire of their descriptions of mobile identities as "split", "dual", "multiple", "tom etc. (Howarth and Torling 2005:83-85). While fully recognising the contribution made by these discussions to making visible the multifacedness of identity formation and completely added to this process by transnational setting, I cannot help but be concerned by the fact that transnational living become constructed both in academic and public discourse as some sort of medical condition, as a way of being, which is both deviant and chaotic. Considering that transnationality is far from being a new phenomenon and that even the most recent wave of rapidly expanding and intensifying transnational tendencies has been reportedly affecting various aspects of human existence for decades, one could thus assume that there is talk about several generations of people existing in on-going state of identity crisis. The point, which I try to make in this paper is that geographical and cultural mobility is not a complex and complicated way of being and that identificational process in the transnational context is not a complex and complicated condition for self-defining; but that the aforementioned arguments that discuss the issue of transnational identity in terms of crisis inevitably and persistently articulate it, firstly, as a temporal phenomenon and, secondly, as something that should be overcome, solved or even cured. What I claim in my project, on the other hand, is that mobility and flux are integral parts of identity formation process and that transnational living which involves on-going physical, geographical, discursive and cultural movements of the actors in their everyday practices within which identity formation takes place is in fact a durable, lasting way of contemporary being and potentially a new and the only sustainable form of identity construction in the nearest future. Within the framework of my project I am therefore engaged in mapping and making visible those geographical, discursive and social places between which migrants are supposedly doomed to shuttle and what is more important in tracing the trajectories that people lay between those places in their everyday actions. By scrupulously drawing a close topography of human practices I am investigating discursive and social mechanisms that are involved in the complex process of rewriting and extending familiar sets of relations that participate in the construction of participants' identities to include new, unfamiliar places, connections and agencies. I am interested in examining how through the process of discursive and social networking the actors bring back into their lives points of references that were made geographically distant and physically unsustainable by their mobility and how the same process of cultural, discursive and physical mobility that seemingly have disrupted and dislocated their identities allows them to make unfamiliar spaces their own, turning them into essential nodes in the new, more complex and more dynamic mode of identity construction, which I describe as *transnational networking*.

THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL GROUNDS



NEXUS OF PRACTICE

- What happens to taken-for-granted, neutralised points of reference when the actors get on the move?
- What happens to the established relational nexuses when they become geographically distant and physically unavailable?
- Do they break completely leaving the actors with the irreparable sense of loss and confusion?
- Or do they become, doubled by a new set of relations adopted from a new cultural context making the actors constantly shuttle between the old familiar and the adopted unfamiliar?
- Or do they continue to be involved in the construction of actors' identities in the shaping of their being, and if yes
- in what form and through what mechanisms?



EXAMPLE 1 Conversation during Russian playgroup meeting, September 21, 2008

1. KATJA: She (Danish day-care) says to me with such a condemn... like how can it be that he (Katja's son) doesn't eat bread?
2. this is how it is I say
3. he eats enormous food
4. she is like for example?
5. salmon I say
6. red caviar with big spoons
7. EVERYBODY: 哈哈



EXAMPLE 2 Conversation during Russian playgroup meeting, September 7, 2008

1. ZHANAR: <Listen listen> I bought this Russian soup for children yesterday you know with chicken red hen its name is
2. RESEARCHER: Where did you buy it?
3. ZHANAR: In the Asian shop of course it is owned by an Afghan couple she speaks Russian a little...
4. the soup is Polish of course but it tastes like in my childhood
5. RESEARCHER: 哈哈
6. ZHANAR: 哈哈



EXAMPLE 3 Conversation during Russian "without children get-togethers", September 8, 2008

1. ZHANAR: I am asking her (the owner of the shop) is it Russian?
2. RESEARCHER: <chicko> Russian?
3. ZHANAR: or from <where>
4. she says storage house I want to know the address @ where it is <from>



[NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT]: [...] I think Velous meant other "green bananas". Those, which are completely green. Even monkeys wouldn't eat those. Everything becomes glued together in the mouth. You can't buy them here. They could be only bought in USSR after having stood in loooooooooooooong queue.

[NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT]: Ok, I got it, if there was no queue, it means the bananas are wrong (I still buy the green ones here though)



[NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT]: You are welcome. I am happy that everything went well. I now have learned to make wonderful vorog in Switzerland. I should get patent on it



[NAME OF THE PARTICIPANT]: [...] And this is a link to the site about vorog and making it yourself. <http://mazzdrovica.com/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?p=7266477265>

This is a problem not only in Denmark - they just don't use it like we in the other countries.

EXAMPLE 4 Interview with Fatima, the owner of Sadko, September 24, 2008

1. FATIMA: I am largely buying such products, these goods are slightly more expensive, but I am buying... exactly not Polish zephyr but the one from Lithuania (the name of the Lithuanian food company) the one that we are used to eat.
2. Some sweets are going to arrive soon from Veche, Vechemija
3. Moskva that is I am not taking the Polish ones...
4. RESEARCHER: Why? What are they worse...?
5. FATIMA: There are more soya in the chocolate... I am buying more expensive products but more natural